

# St. Anthony's Wilderness

Reflections of a Visitor



Passion for the outdoors and one particular place,  
St. Anthony's Wilderness, has inspired this.

*Stony Mtn Man*

## BDU-33

“There are no facts, only interpretations.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche

Many folks know that BDUs are the military's battle dress uniforms in various camouflage patterns. Few know that the BDU-33 is a 25-pound cast-iron and steel ordnance that is used in jet fighter training to simulate actual bombs. The Bomb Dummy Unit 33 is harmless when dropped on the range where it's intended. Not when it's dropped on a hiking trail in St. Anthony's Wilderness. Please let me relate the event.



Heavy runoff from the remnants of Hurricane Ivan had eroded the rail-trail at Yellow Springs and other sites in Stony Creek Valley. On Wednesday October 13, 2004, a hiker spent the day exploring and photographing the damage. At some point the hiker was “sitting in the food plot at Yellow Springs watching two A-10s overhead. Ate a sandwich and watched the show.”<sup>1</sup>

The A-10 “Warthogs” were still in the air when the hiker began exiting the valley, heading east toward Cold Spring via the rail-trail when the unthinkable occurred. “It took a while for me to realize what had occurred. Couldn't believe it! Retraced my steps. Still couldn't believe it! Never thought for a moment that I would find the impact area on the rail trail.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hiker's field notes (October 13, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> *Fighter jet accidentally drops dummy bomb near hiker*, Harrisburg Patriot-News (October 23, 2004)

IMAGE – Photo of a BDU-33 - courtesy of *AF.mil*

# Fighter jet accidentally drops dummy bomb near hiker

BY TOM BOWMAN  
Of The Patriot-News

**FORT INDIANTOWN GAP** • A Thunderbolt jet fighter accidentally dropped a 25-pound cast-iron practice bomb on a hiking trail north of the Gap, prompting military officials to ground the plane while they investigate.

No one was injured in the Oct. 13 accident, said Gap spokesman Col. Chris Cleaver, but the nonexplosive bomb, often called a dummy bomb,

fell near a hiker who reported it to the state Game Commission.

The bomb fell in the Lebanon County part of the 18-mile abandoned rail trail that runs through state game land from Dauphin in Dauphin County to High Bridge Dam in Schuylkill County.

"The two Thunderbolts had been in the air quite a while," the hiker said in an e-mail to the game commission. "I was heading east on the rail trail ... when I heard the impact. It took a while for me to realize what

had occurred. Couldn't believe it! Retraced my steps. Still couldn't believe it! Never thought for a moment that I would find the impact area on the rail trail."

The Game Commission released the e-mail to The Patriot-News but would not identify the hiker. Jerry Feaser, a spokesman for the commission, also would not release two pictures of the dummy bomb that the hiker sent to the commission.

"Never thought for a moment that I would find the impact area on the rail trail." <sup>1</sup> The distance between the hiker and the impact site was never determined. Nonetheless the impact was palpable. The impact was heard and physically felt by the hiker.



<sup>1</sup> *Fighter jet accidentally drops dummy bomb near hiker*, Harrisburg Patriot-News (October 23, 2004)

IMAGE – A-10 “Warthog” releasing the Bomb Dummy Unit 33,  
Photo courtesy of *AF.mil*

The Public Affairs Office at Fort Indiantown Gap said “the plane that dropped the bomb was an A-10 jet. They had six bombs on board. This was the fifth pass, one bomb per pass, flying east at 10,000 feet. The pilot pushed the release on the bomb – everything's normal – and he turns left. That's part of the tactic. Something caused that bomb to hang and it dropped and landed on the rails to trails. The bomb landed more than a mile north of the target.”<sup>1</sup>



*“The bomb landed more than a mile north of the target.”* As a matter of fact, impact on the rail-trail was *over two miles* from the intended target.

The Public Affairs Office stated, “All military aircraft used in war, as they are in Iraq today, a bomb that hangs and would cause it to go off-target, is a tremendous safety concern for friendly troops. Whether it's in peace time training environment or on the front lines of war, when you have a bomb that hangs up, that is a significant safety concern.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fighter jet accidentally drops dummy bomb near hiker*, Harrisburg Patriot-News (October 23, 2004)

IMAGE – Photo taken by the hiker on October 13, 2004





The circles in the photo highlight the smoke from the training rounds of two A-10s on the Bollen Live-Fire Range at Fort Indiantown Gap. Before the hiker arrived at the rail-trail impact site, the cloud of smoke released on impact from the BDU spotting charge had dispersed.

The Fort Indiantown Gap Public Affairs Office (PAO) reached out to the hiker eight days after the incident – the following is a transcript (*italics*) of the exchange between the hiker and the Public Affairs Office on October 21, 2004.

*Hiker: Please explain what occurred that day. Awaiting your reply.*

*PAO: Sir. I think a conversation over the phone would be best. The details are extensive.*

*PAO: We are going to do a press release on this Sir. The media may want to talk to you. You don't have to but we will have to know if you want to or not. I guarantee they ask who was standing there when it happened.*

*Hiker: What's so complicated? Was it munition from the Thunderbolts in the air that day?*

IMAGE – Photo taken by the hiker on March 17, 2005. Looking south from the top of Second Mountain into Fort Indiantown Gap. Two A-10s were on the range. The yellow circles highlight the plume of smoke from the impact of training rounds.

*PAO: It was what is called a BDU 33 (Bomb Dummy Unit). It released late. The pilot did a high altitude bomb run, that they do all the time. Only this time when he hit the pickle switch (trigger) there was a delay. The best way to describe it is if you ever fired a gun it would be like pulling the trigger and the firing pin hitting the primer and there would be a laps of time before the primer actually set the charge off to fire the bullet. I don't know if that helps you understand? If you want to see what one of these things looks like I have one in my office. Yes it was from an A-10.*

*Hiker: The BDU was intended for the range between First and Second Mountains, but by accident impacted dead center on the rail-trail. Is that correct?*

*PAO: It was to hit on the bomb range but the delay caused it to hit dead center of the rail bed. Do you want to talk to media?*

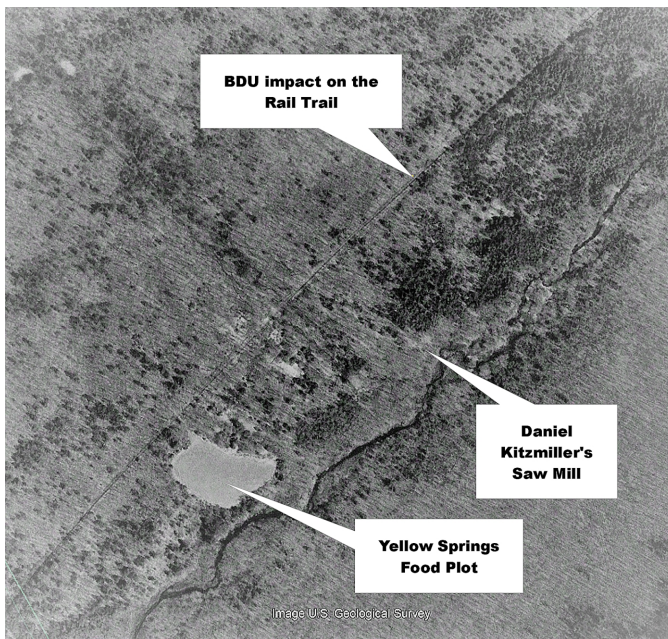


IMAGE – Graphic created by the author using an aerial photo from the U.S. Geological Survey

“The Thunderbolt A-10 that dropped the bomb flew in the first Gulf War. The jet is assigned to the 111<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing at Willow Grove naval Air Station. Guard officials ruled out pilot error in the accident and said the pilot who dropped the bomb had more than 2,800 flight hours.”<sup>1</sup>

Public Affairs Office at Fort Indiantown Gap, “the military has concluded the latest accident, one they call a *hung bomb*, was not a systemwide failure. It's going to be a malfunction of a piece of equipment on the aircraft. So, no, it wouldn't mandate some type of safety stand-down. If the pilot failed to follow procedure, if it was pilot error, some kind of lack of training, that would dictate a stand-down.”<sup>2</sup>

Public Affairs Office, “The safety officer feels the bomb was hung for about two seconds in the beginning of a turn. But they're still looking at that.

Not sure when officials will rule on the cause of the accident but it could come in the next two weeks. I would hope sooner that that but once again they have to go thorough [sic] a deliberate process. But the important thing for them is to find out what happened, not to rush through it. If a bomb gets stuck inside an aircraft, the pilot will try to fly to his home base, in this case, Willow Grove.”<sup>2</sup>

## Bomb mishap fails to close range at Gap

BY TOM BOWMAN  
Of Our Palmyra Bureau

**LEBANON** • Military officials have not determined why a fighter jet last week dropped a nonexplosive practice bomb near a hiker who was walking along a trail north of Fort Indiantown Gap.

Officials say the Gap's bombing range will stay open for jets to practice bombing even though the cause has not been found.

In August 2003, Gap officials closed a machine gun range after Sgt. Rudolph B. Flaim of Jerome, near Johnstown, was killed when a machine gun misfired, killing him.

“This was mechanical failure and the death of Rudy Flaim was human error, failure to follow procedures,” said Gap spokesman.

<sup>1</sup> *Fighter jet accidentally drops dummy bomb near hiker*, Harrisburg Patriot-News (October 23, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> *Bomb mishap fails to close range at Gap*, Harrisburg Patriot-News (October 27, 2004)

IMAGE - *Bomb mishap fails to close range at Gap*, Harrisburg Patriot-News (October 27, 2004)

“The bombing range at the Gap has been used since August 1979. Planning for the facility, however, began three years before that when the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force switched to the lighter, faster A-7D fighter jets.”<sup>1</sup>

The pilots are kept in a holding pattern over DeHart Dam until it's “certain that the bomb range is clear. Once that determination is made, the bombing runs begin.”<sup>2</sup> Each pilot is asked what type of delivery is planned; a steep dive or a low-level passover. “The bombs hit the ground with tremendous force. They'll tear up the ground. Some go about 25 feet into the ground. We figured it out one time. It hits with something like 7,000 kinetic pounds per square inch.”<sup>2</sup>

“25 feet into the ground ... hits with something like 7,000 kinetic pounds per square inch.” It's not surprising the impact was physically felt by the hiker. I've seen identical holes in the old railroad bed which could not be explained until the hiker's photos. I've spent many hours in the food plot at Yellow Springs watching the A-10s use the air-to-ground range. Because both sons served in the U.S. Air Force, one an aircraft maintainer, and the other a combat engineer, I respect the pilots and their aircraft. But targeting a recreational rail trail is dishonorable. It was not an accident – please let me explain.

Let's examine the PAO's statements to the press. “The Thunderbolt A-10 that dropped the bomb flew in the first Gulf War. The jet is assigned to the 111<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing at Willow Grove Naval Air Station. Guard officials ruled out pilot error in the accident and said the pilot who dropped the bomb had more than 2,800 flight hours.”<sup>3</sup>

With more than 2,800 flight hours, it's possible that the pilot who dropped the bomb on the rail trail was in an A-10 seat sporting butter bars in the Gulf War. Perhaps he was in the flights of A-10 Warthogs that were especially deadly, expending all their munitions and cannon ammunition during multiple attack runs on the retreating Iraqi army in February 1991.

<sup>1</sup> *Pilots of Air National Guard zero in on targets at Gap*, Harrisburg Patriot (September 29, 1985)

<sup>2</sup> *Pilots of Air National Guard zero in on targets at Gap*, Harrisburg Patriot (September 29, 1985)

<sup>3</sup> *Fighter jet accidentally drops dummy bomb near hiker*, Harrisburg Patriot-News (October 23, 2004)



The offender might have been a lowly lieutenant who targeted the narrow recreational trail surrounded by acres and acres of forest. Not a chance. It was more like a high-ranking officer who was doing a tour behind a desk while maintaining flying status. Naturally, this is just speculation, however I can see where flying the Warthog could bring back those memories of pummeling the doomed convoy. Find anything of Saddam's army and take it out. I believe a pilot with more than 2,800 flight hours can be bored with dropping dummy bombs and strafing with the 30mm Gatling-style gun on the Fort Indiantown Gap range. He decided to show-off to his wingman.

Not reported was the fact that the hiker had contacts familiar with the use of the BDU-33 training ordnance. Here's the skinny. The BDU-33 is propelled off the ejector rack on command from the pilot's input. A cartridge (looks like a short shotgun shell) fires and actuates the release mechanism. Cartridges (carts) do misfire, or not fire at all, and this results in a "hung bomb." The training round does not come off after a misfire or no-fire. The bomb DID NOT strike the recreational trail accidentally. The pilot TARGETED the trail. It was a bad decision and an utter lack of responsibility. Of course the PAO would deny this.

A few years after the bomb was dropped on the recreational trail the A-10s were leaving Willow Grove. "The Pennsylvania Air National Guard unit stationed at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove, Pa., will be transitioning to a joint interagency installation as a result of the Department of Defense's 2005 Base Realignment and Closure recommendations. With the new mission coming onboard, the 111th Fighter Wing is scheduled to lose its fleet of A-10 Thunderbolt IIs beginning in the spring of 2009."<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> *Willow Grove unit completes last A-10 deployment*  
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs (September 17, 2008)

IMAGE – PA tailcode on the A-10s at Willow Grove – the 'Philly Hogs.'  
Tailcode photo courtesy of the Air Force Times

“As the wing continues to dissolve, its remaining five A-10 fighter planes will be redistributed to out-of-state guard units and the skies above Lebanon and Dauphin counties will be a little more naked without them.”<sup>1</sup> The hiker did not see the PA tailcode on the aircraft. It was probably the last day the hiker would see the 'Philly Hogs' in Stony Creek Valley.

The pilot who dropped the bomb should have been censured, maybe he was behind closed doors. The range was not shut down – it was not an aircraft malfunction. Give me truth. As I write this, there's a marine lieutenant colonel charged with six crimes in a special court-martial because he criticized military leadership on social media for the poorly executed United States exit from the Afghan war.

### *Stony Mountain Man*



<sup>1</sup> *111th Pennsylvania National Guard wing shutdown leaves vacancy in Pennsylvania skies*, Harrisburg Patriot-News (May 27, 2010)

IMAGE - 111th Fighter Wing maintainer marshals out an A-10 Thunderbolt II on a close-air-support mission at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan. The last deployment of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard unit stationed at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove, PA. Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force